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Auditor's report: Superintendent salaries inflated

Wagner suggests consolidating the 19 districts

By EDWARD L. KENNEY
The News Journal

Many of Delaware's school district superintendents make higher salaries than high-ranking officials in state government. They also make more in many cases than superintendents in nearby states, according to a report released Monday by the state auditor's office.

"We have too much administrative cost in public education," State Auditor R. Tom Wagner Jr. said. "It has to be addressed."

Wagner wants the state to consolidate its 19 districts, saying such a move would trim excess administrators and keep more education dollars in the classroom. Delaware has three districts -- Delmar, Polytech and Sussex Tech -- that have one building each.

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The report compares the salaries of superintendents in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania with those in Delaware. The comparisons, based on data compiled from the 2008 fiscal year, show that in the smaller school districts in other states, the superintendents earn about \$30,000 less in their base salaries than the Delaware superintendents of the same small-size districts.

In many cases, the number of schools in a district or student enrollment numbers do not seem to serve as a determining factor in what a superintendent makes, Wagner said. For instance Seaford School District Superintendent Russell Knorr makes \$149,888 in a district with six schools and 3,367 students.

"There just doesn't seem to be a lot of rhyme or reason to how the salaries are set," he said.

Colonial School District Superintendent George Meney leads the list of highest paid Delaware superintendents with \$193,000 annually for leading a district with 13 schools and 10,430 students. Red Clay Consolidated School District Superintendent Robert Andrzejewski is second with \$171,543 in a district with 28 schools and 15,721 students. And Brandywine Superintendent Jim Scanlon ranks third with \$167,075 for a district of 18 schools and 10,113 students.

"With the difficult times our state is facing and teachers being asked to take pay cuts, everybody has to take a pay cut," said newly elected Red Clay School Board member Kimberly Williams, co-founder of the "Fix Red Clay" blog. "If that's what needs to be done, I have no problem with that. Everyone has to make a sacrifice, and that should start with the top. Everybody has to share it."

But Meney said he believes it's a case of misplaced priorities when it comes to the salaries.

"Nobody says a word when we pay a movie actor millions of dollars to entertain or an athlete to

entertain," he said. "In our society, we need to say that it is a greater value to serve the public than to entertain the public."

The auditor's report points out that eight of the 19 Delaware superintendents make more money than the \$155,450 salary paid to state Secretary of Education Lillian Lowery.

Seventeen Delaware superintendents also made more in salary than the \$132,500 earned by former Gov. Ruth Ann Minner, although only two of the superintendents were paid more than the \$171,000 earned by current Gov. Jack Markell, benefactor of a subsequent raise in the position's pay scale. Markell has pledged to take a 20 percent pay cut, bringing his salary to \$138,600, for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

"Most people would assume that the governor is one of the highest paid people in the state," Wagner said. "What we're saying is we have 19 superintendents and they're among the highest paid state employees."

Responding to the auditor's report, top-earner Meney said he questions the comparisons of salaries earned by superintendents of nearby states, citing the \$250,000 that superintendents make in places such as West Chester, Pa., and Cherry Hill, N.J.

"I don't know that I would say that the market is totally what he's suggesting," he said of Wagner.

"The superintendents' market is national; it's not just regional," Meney added. "Superintendents can move."

"The point is, I didn't go into this business to make money. If you go into this business for any other reason than to serve the public, then you're in the wrong business. I don't think any educator is overpaid, or any public servant."

Wagner said Meney -- who has served as superintendent in Colonial for about 10 years and as deputy superintendent for about 10 years before that -- is an example of someone who might earn a higher salary because of longevity. Expertise in a particular problem area of a district also should be factored in when determining salary, he added.

But, he said, the salaries are generally too high.

"It really gets back to the administrative cost of public education," he said. "Teachers' salaries are not going to get you where you need to go. The further it gets away from the classroom, the further it gets away from teaching kids."

The auditor's report recommends that the state consider the consolidation of school districts to minimize administrative costs.

"Having 19 districts appears excessive for the number of students and schools within the state, as compared to other districts and states," the report said.

Wagner said his office plans to release a follow-up report, perhaps by Wednesday, that will go into greater detail on how consolidation can be achieved, including combining the leadership of the three vocational school districts so that they all operate under one superintendent, one business manager and one buildings supervisor. Such a move could save between \$4 million to \$5 million, he said.

Additional Facts

SUPERINTENDENT SALARIES

District	Number of schools	Number of students	Superintendent 2008 fiscal year salary
1	1	1,000	\$155,450
2	1	1,000	\$155,450
3	1	1,000	\$155,450
4	1	1,000	\$155,450
5	1	1,000	\$155,450
6	1	1,000	\$155,450
7	1	1,000	\$155,450
8	1	1,000	\$155,450
9	1	1,000	\$155,450
10	1	1,000	\$155,450
11	1	1,000	\$155,450
12	1	1,000	\$155,450
13	1	1,000	\$155,450
14	1	1,000	\$155,450
15	1	1,000	\$155,450
16	1	1,000	\$155,450
17	1	1,000	\$155,450
18	1	1,000	\$155,450
19	1	1,000	\$155,450

Appoquinimink 11 8,193 Tony Marchio \$162,876

Brandywine 18 10,113 Jim Scanlon \$167,075

Caesar Rodney 13 7,143 Kevin Fitzgerald \$143,651

Cape Henlopen 8 4,493 George Stone \$157,306

Capital 11 6,179 Michael Thomas \$147,854

Christina 26 17,292 Lillian Lowery* \$163,737

Colonial 13 10,430 George Meney \$193,000

Delmar 2 (1 building) 1,149 David Ring Jr. \$113,315

Indian River 13 8,388 Susan Bunting \$138,720

Lake Forest 6 3,930 Daniel Curry \$136,769

Laurel 5 2,099 Linda Schenck** \$119,196

Milford 5 4,070 Robert Smith \$161,448

NCC Votech 4 4,105 Steven Godowsky \$161,366

Polytech 1 1,147 Dianne Sole \$152,946

Red Clay 28 15,721 Robert Andrzejewski \$171,543

Seaford 6 3,367 Russel Knorr \$149,888

Smyrna 7 4,460 Deborah Wicks \$133,280

Sussex Technical 1 1,249 Patrick Savini \$136,778

Woodbridge 3 2,012 Kevin Carson \$138,483

- Left earlier this year to become Delaware's Secretary of Education

- Acting superintendent SOURCE: STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE
